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## The British Presence in the Malay World: A Meeting of Civilizational Traditions

CAROLINA LÓPEZ C.

### ABSTRAK

*Rencana ini mengkaji titik pertemuan dan perbezaan dalam nilai, andaian dan tafsiran yang mendasari pertembungan sejarah antara tradisi British dengan Melayu di zaman penjajahan Malaya dahulu. Kajian ini mengusulkan bahawa selain mengkaji hubungan kuasa antara kedua-duanya, adalah perlu untuk menemui andaian paradigmatic yang sebahagian besarnya bersifat tersirat dan membuat kedua-dua pihak memandang dan menilai gejala yang sama itu berbeza sama sekali. Andaian asas kajian ini ialah penjajah British dan orang Melayu mempunyai penapis dalaman yang berbeza menghadapi isu kritikal. Perbezaan dalam mekanisme membuat penafsiran itu, biasanya tanpa disedari itulah merupakan sumber ketegangan dan juga salah faham yang tidak dikaji di kalangan kumpulan daripada tradisi yang berbeza-beza itu. Penulis harap perhatian yang diberi kepada pertemuan dan perbezaan yang mendasari nilai dan mekanisme penafsiran itu besar nilainya dalam menyelesaikan konflik antara tradisi daripada budaya yang berlainan, yang menimbulkan cabaran besar kepada dunia hari ini.*

*Kata kunci: dualat, lanun, cukai, hamba, sistem kepercayaan dalaman*

### ABSTRACT

*This article examines points of convergence and divergence in values, assumptions and interpretations underlying historical encounters between the British and the Melayu traditions in colonial Malaya. It proposes that in addition to examining power relations between them, it is necessary to uncover the largely unconscious paradigmatic assumptions causing them to view and value the same phenomena in radically different ways. The basic proposition of the study is that the British colonizers and the Melayu brought different internalized filters within themselves to the critical junctures – or the actual encounters occurring between the two groups. These differences in interpretative mechanisms, held largely below the level of consciousness, constitute an often unexamined source of tension and misunderstanding among groups from diverse traditions. It is the author's hope that attention given to convergence and divergence in underlying values and interpretative mechanisms may be of*

*use in resolving conflict between different traditions, which presently pose a grave challenge to the world today.*

*Key Words: dualat, piracy, revenue, hamba, internalized belief system*

## INTRODUCTION

Civil society in Malaysia consists of a complex mosaic of peoples having different cultural, religious and historical backgrounds. This diversity often leads to differences in interests, values, priorities and worldviews among the cultural communities comprising the national populace. Any attempt to analyze the dynamics of governance and civil society today should thus take into account the historical roots and the diverse worldviews found in Malaysia's plural demographic make-up. This paper proposes to examine salient or critical junctures where actors from two of these civilizational traditions came into contact with each other during the time of British colonial rule in Malaya past. Specifically, it will focus on similarities and differences between the political systems and the worldviews of the Malay World (*Dunia Melayu*) and those brought to the region in the early nineteenth century by the British colonizers. For this purpose, the Ideological-Structural Analysis (I-SA) will be applied. I-SA is a set of theoretical constructs which invites analysts to go beyond the typical starting point for political analysis – the meeting of actors in the political arena – and probe into what the diverse actors bring to the critical juncture within themselves in terms of implicit understandings, modes of interpretation and culturally-bound systems for assessing and assigning values to given situations. Figure 1 provides a visual summary of the ensuing I-SA of the encounter between these two civilizational traditions.

As Figure 1 above indicates, the present article aims to examine underlying similarities and differences between the British and the *Melayu* systems of governance and the implicit understandings found within each of these paradigms. To do so, the article begins with a brief historical overview of life in the *Dunia Melayu* prior to the arrival of the British. It is important to caution the reader that the literature available on Malay history appears to fall into two somewhat broad categories. Older studies written by European scholars and some Western-trained Malays are often permeated with orientalist overtones. Some of the analytical categories used in these works may not be adequate for capturing the rich realities being studied, nor the worldviews and the values underlying them. A second and more recent trend found in the literature appears to be strongly nationalistic in perspective; many of these works have been written by Malaysians and Malayphiles in the late colonial and the post-colonial periods. This genre of writings became particularly prevalent in the 1970s. The strength of these writings is that they may come closer to capturing the categories and

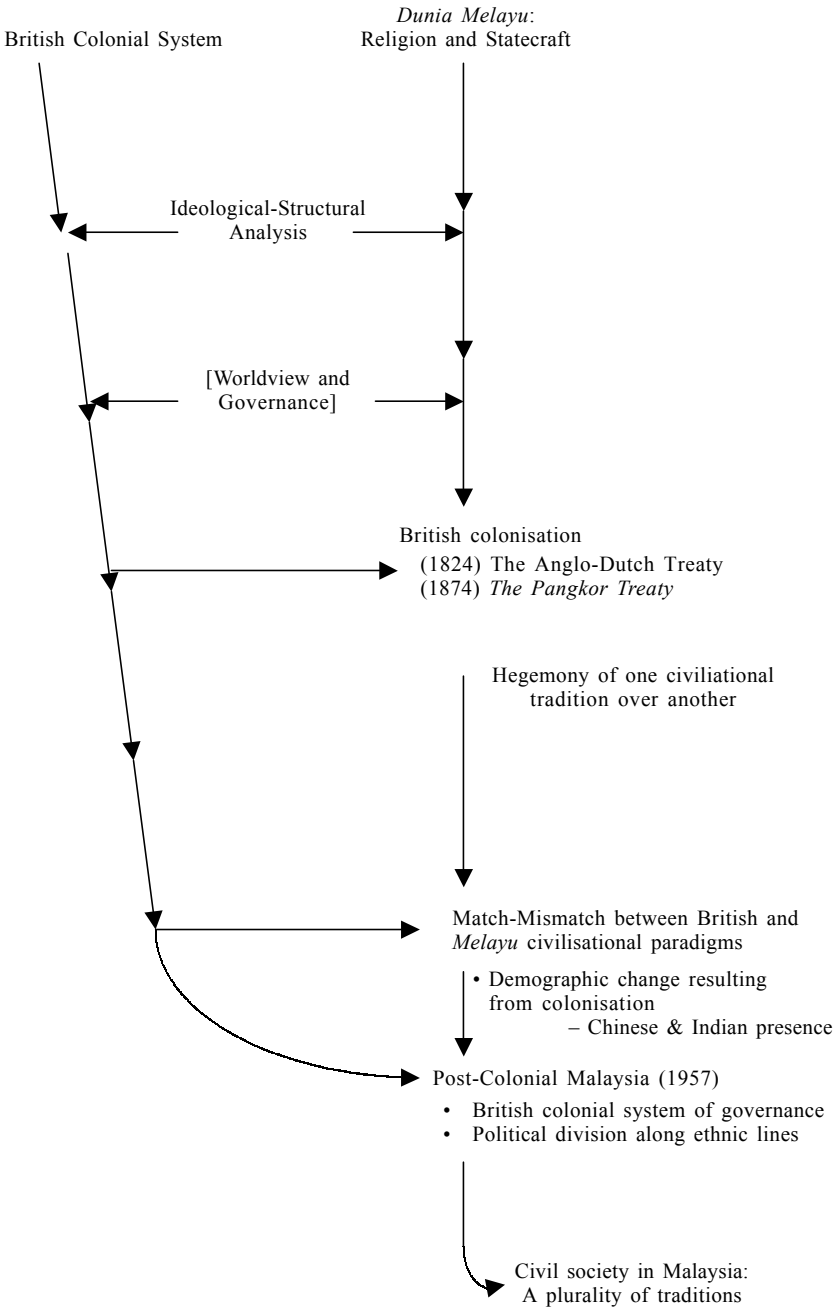


FIGURE 1. The meeting of two civilizational traditions: The British presence in the Malay World

modes of understanding implicit in the Malay worldview. However, because of the strong nationalist overtone, they tend to idealize the subject matter in question. In short, both the orientalist and the 'nationalist' positions may be woven with an implicit set of biases arising from these writers, each immersed in their own positions with reference to the subject matter, their worldviews and their times. Both genre are useful to the study of Malaysian history; as long as readers are able to keep in mind the position of each author *vis-a-vis* the subject matter.

The present reflection will utilize the Ideological-Structural analytical lenses in a conscious attempt to avoid falling into either of these ideological camps. While it is not possible to obtain pure objectivity, this study will aim to uncover underlying similarities and differences between the British and the Malay worldviews with the greatest possible detachment from any unconscious ideological position.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Due to its favorable location on the trade route between India and China, Peninsular Malaysia has long been a place where peoples of different civilizations and belief systems have come into contact with each other. Since the height of Srivijaya – from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century – the region had served as an entrepot, or an international trade center where peoples from diverse civilizational paradigms had met. The presence of Muslim traders in the region and the embracing of Islam by Melaka's first sultan during the 14<sup>th</sup> century consolidated the Islamic teachings, values and way of life already existed in the Malay World. This, in conjunction with the Malay royal state, has provided the basis for a particularly *Melayu* worldview.

## PRE-MELAKAN MALAYSIA

Although difficult to reconstruct its history, pre-Melakan Malaysia is thought to have been populated by a gradual movement of peoples into the archipelago over a vast period of time, accompanied by ongoing demographic movement, back and forth between islands and along coasts and rivers. For East Malaysia, it is believed that man may have inhabited the area as long as 40,000 years ago (Harrison 1970); while evidence of the human presence in Peninsular Malaysia dates back around 10,000 years. Among the diverse groups found early on in the region, a common thread was the worldview embracing animism and ancestor worship, intertwined with veneration of the forces of fertility. Early Indian migration to the region added both Hindu and Buddhist understandings to the larger belief system and worldview.

Trade has long played an important role in shaping the region's history. For centuries prior to the founding of Malacca, the archipelago had been a key location in a vast trade network stretching from Africa to China. Due to its location, Peninsular Malaysia came to link the markets of India and China in a time span thought to range from the third to the fifth centuries. While the Malays living along the rivers and coasts engaged in both fishing and trading, the *orang asli* inhabited the jungle areas. It was primarily the *orang asli* who harvested the forest products, while the Malays and other merchants would sell such commodities as rattan, tin and gold, at the market. In addition to the sale of forest products, the Malays traded in products from other regions throughout the trade routes. According to Andaya and Andaya (1984:14), it is this "development of an international exchange trade, its changing patterns and its effects on local society [which provides] the key to understanding early Malaysian history."

Somewhere around 300 AD, Indian merchants began trade voyages into Malay World. This contact exposed Malays to Buddhism and Hinduism. Contact was to the point that 7<sup>th</sup> century writings in old Malay are found to be heavily Sanskritized, and the model of Malay kinship reflects a strong Hindu influence. Indian vessels coming with the monsoon seasons were forced to remain in the area until they could sail back during the season of the northeast winds. This created a demand for a place to discharge cargo, repair ships and purchase goods for the return trip home. Furthermore, with the establishment of trade links with China from the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, many small settlements sprang up along the main maritime routes. Between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries the region was a thriving entrepot for trade from the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, with multiple local markets and collecting points scattered along the coast lines (Andaya & Andaya 1984).

It is believed that the maritime kingdom of Srivijaya arose in the Palembang region in Southeastern Sumatra sometime in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and flourished until the end of the 13<sup>th</sup>. It became a distribution center for products from India, western Asia and China, as well as those from its own empire. Governance was carried out along the lines of a structured royal hierarchy with the *Maharaja* as the primary figure. During the height of its power, Srivijaya exercised suzerainty over many smaller trade centers in the Malay World. One of the major functions of Srivijaya's power had been to keep sea passage safe for merchants from the *orang laut* or sea people, who often boarded and looted vessels which encroached on 'their waters'. However, with the decline of Srivijayan regional power – which coincided with its loss of influence over the *orang laut* – the area became notorious for the dangers to ships navigating its waters. As one Chinese merchant observed: "If some foreign ship passing Srivijaya should not enter the port, an armed party will certainly board it and kill the sailors to the last man." At times, Srivijaya itself was forced to stretch an iron chain across the harbor to prevent 'pirates' from entering. At the same time, as the smaller ports

and vassal states grew, the kingdom was less able to impose itself as the region's principal market (Mohd. Yusoff Hashim 1992).

## MALACCA

Both the *Sejarah Melayu* and the Portuguese account written by Tomé Pires attributed the establishment of Malacca to Prince Parameswara, who left the Palembang-Srivijayan region of Sumatra after the invasion of the kingdom by Javanese around 1397. He travelled to Tumasik (now Singapore) and eventually established the Malay sultanate in Malacca. The height of the Sultanate lasted for about a century, from 1400 to 1511, when the Portuguese arrived at Malacca.<sup>1</sup>

It has often been pointed out that the traditions of Malacca were a legacy of Sri Vijaya... Parameswara, the first ruler of Malacca, was a descendent of the royal house of Palembang... The political experience which he gained whilst at Palembang...as well as the economic factors probably helped him in developing his strategies and promoting the rise of Malacca as a Malay 'emporium' in the fifteenth century. The presence of the Orang Laut who accompanied Parameswara when he retreated from Singapore to Malacca prior to 1400, assisted him in maintaining the defense and security of the Straits of Malacca (Mohd. Yusoff Hashim 1992:181).

Upon embracing Islam, Prince Parameswara took the name of Megat Iskandar Shah (Harris 1990), opening the way for a gradual grafting of Islamic beliefs and practices on a Hindu-style court system inherited from its Srivijayan roots. Throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Malacca enjoyed great importance as a trade center where Indian, Arab, Chinese and other merchants bought and sold goods throughout the larger region. Malacca's system of governance served as a model for "subsequent Malay kingdoms and became the basis of what was later termed 'traditional Malay culture and statescraft' " (Andaya & Andaya 1984:37). One of the most impressive achievements of the Malacca court was the formulation of a concept regarding the nature of the state and how it should ideally function. This concept, clearly expressed in the *Sejarah Melayu*, became an integral part of the Malay worldview and remained basically unchallenged until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even today, elements of earlier statescraft can be discerned in modern Malay political relationships and in the functioning of Malay society itself (Andaya & Andaya 1984:45).

The royal court system inherited from the pre-Malaccan period, overlaid with Islamic understandings of divine law and governance, form the basis for both the system of governance and the larger worldview prevalent in the Malay World. The basic system of governance inherited in Malacca came from a Hindu structure of kingship and social organisation. Authors such as Andaya & Andaya (2001) also indicate a Buddhist influence on the system. It might be said that Islam was 'grafted' onto the existing structure and, over time, took increasingly deeper root in the worldview, values and identity construction of the

Malaccan sultanate. Naturally, during Parameswara's reign and initially thereafter, the evolving belief system was somewhat syncretic in nature. Over time, however, Islamic understandings came to permeate the collective worldview to the extent of becoming foundational to the very notion of 'Malayness'. From the reign of Iskandar Shah, Islamic understandings increasingly permeated successive sultanates to the extent that the very notion of being Malay has come to include an implicit adherence to the Islamic faith.

### THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF ISLAM

The Islamic faith had been present in the Malay World before Prince Parameswara's conversion in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. Although it may not be possible to fix a precise date for the arrival of Islam in the Malay World, by the 9<sup>th</sup> century it is believed that Arab traders were already familiar with the area. By the 10<sup>th</sup> century, they began to engage in organized trade in the region. Early Muslim tombs have been found in the area bearing dates such as 1082 AD (475 AH) and 1101 AD (495 AH) (Andaya & Andaya 1984). An account by Marco Polo in 1292 mentioned the fact that the town of Perlak in northern Sumatra was Islamic. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Muslim traders from India came to dominate more trade than the Arab Muslims in the area. It is to these Indian Muslims that the spread of Islam in the archipelago is credited. Specifically, it is estimated that approximately 1,000 Indian Muslims from Gujarat and other areas of the subcontinent resided in Malacca during this period. In addition, there were several thousand others who came in and out of the port during their trade voyages. Such a strong presence played an important part in spreading Islamic attitudes, values and ways of life in the area (Andaya & Andaya 1984). It is here that the Sufism of Aceh in Sumatra might have had an influence on the process of Islamization during 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Malay World at large (Lukman 1999). The Trengganu Stone, which enjoins obedience to Allah and His laws, is thought to be the oldest Malay text in Arabic script, dating back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

By the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, under Sultan Iskandar Shah, (Srivijayan Prince Parameswara), Malacca had embraced Islam and had come to enjoy the favor of Muslim Indian textile traders, as well as others from the vast reaches of Asia and parts of the Middle East.

Depicting a Moslem ruler as 'the Shadow of God Upon the Earth' and by making him the head of a religious hierarchy extending to the village level, Islam provides a new ideology which further strengthen kinship. These advantages, propagated by Moslem preachers, were readily understood in Melaka and may help to explain the decision of one of its earliest rulers [Parameswara] to embrace the new faith. . . . As Melaka expanded territorially, it persuaded or compelled its vassals in the Straits area to accept Islam. . . . Melaka's main contribution to this ongoing court culture was the incorporation of Islamic ideas. Though Islam had been promoted earlier by Samudra-Pasai, the new religion became so

closely identified with Malay society in Melaka that to become Moslem, it was said, was to *masuk Melayu* (Andaya & Andaya 1984: 53-55).

While sources vary in their assessment of the role of Islam in Malay understandings of governance, in the successive Malaccan sultanates, Islam – with its values, precepts and social codes – increasingly permeated Malay statecraft and became integral to the collective notion of Malayness. For detailed information on the divergence and convergence between Islamic law and the codes governing the Melakan state (Muhammad Yusoff 1992; Gullick 1988). According to the Gullick, the “transmuted [Persian] form [of] Muslim kingship was readily compatible with the Hindu and indigenous blend of monarchy prevalent in 14<sup>th</sup> century Southeast Asia” (p.xi), thus facilitating the grafting and progressive permeation of Islamic ideas and understandings into the *Melayu* state and worldview.

MALAY STATECRAFT

Figure 2 below provides a brief visual overview of the structure of the Malaccan State.

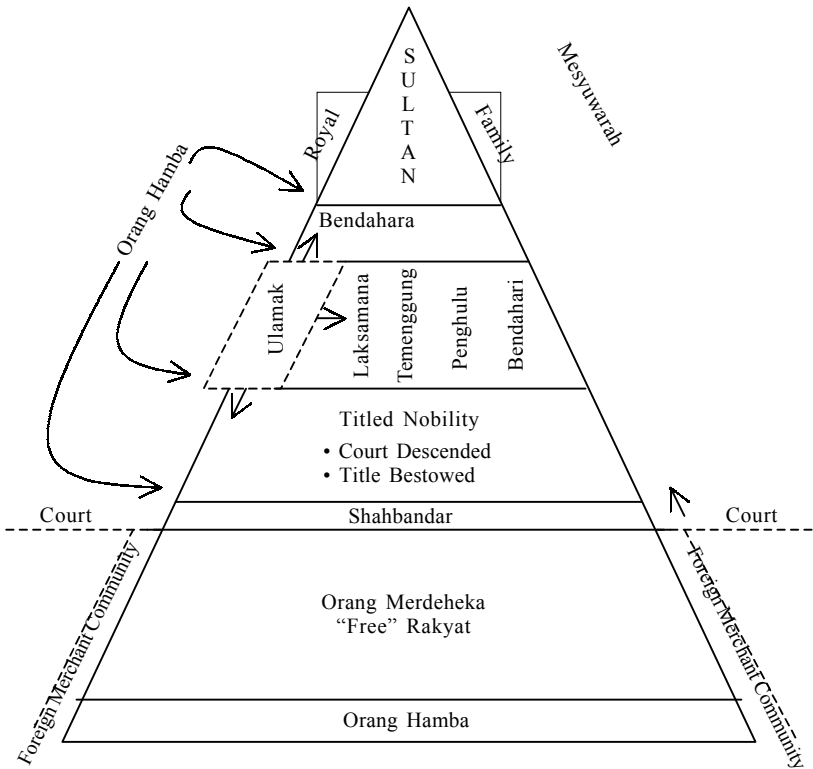


FIGURE 2. Organizational summary of the Malaccan State



The structure of government which evolved in the Malaccan tradition begins with the *Raja* or the Sultan, descended from royal lineage. His court would always be loyal to him. In turn, the king must never put any of his subjects to shame, less this lead to the destruction of the kingdom by God. In turn, Malay subjects have the divine duty to never be disloyal to their rulers, even if they behave unfairly or are unjust to them. In this system, the ruler is subject only to God. "The ruling dynasty's association with its sacred Melayu-Palembang origins formed the basis of its exclusiveness" (Andaya & Andaya 1984: 45). However, with the coming of Islam, the Arabic word *daulat* was adopted to express the cultural and religious concept which places the ruler above reproach and criticism, and requires unquestioning loyalty from his subjects (Zainal Abidin 1970). Gullick (1988: xiv) explain: "The Malay word for royal majesty is *daulat* and it will serve as an illustration of the process by which the Malay ruler put on the mantle of Islam. The majesty of pre-Islamic kings was expressed in the word *andeka* but on conversion to the new faith, the rulers evidently felt the need to substitute an Arabic word. In classical Arabic there is presumably no suitable word for the alien concept of semi-divine kingship, and a Persian word would not have given the same authority. The Arabic word *daulat* is 'a prayer for the king's long life'. Through various transmutations "the use of *daulat* to mean royal majesty can be derived". In the Malaccan Sultanate system, "the ruler remained above the mundane affairs of state, leaving his ministers to carry out the practical duties of administration" (Andaya & Andaya 1984: 70). The highest minister was the *bendahara*, who was expected to carry out the administrative and diplomatic duties of the state with complete loyalty. The *bendahara* might be loosely compared to a prime minister, since he was the highest-ranking person in charge of internal and external affairs of the state. Along with the other ministers, he also functioned as a mediator between the Sultan and the outside world.

Within the next rank of ministers were the *temenggung*, the *laksamana* and the *penghulu bendahari*. The *temenggung* was in charge of Melaka's security and police force. The *laksamana* led the Malaccan military and the naval fleets. Because of his authority over Malaccan waters, it was imperative for him to command the loyalty of the *orang laut* in order to ensure the safe passage of merchant ships bound for the port of Malacca. In other cases, the *orang laut* boarded passing ships seen to be trespassing into the territorial waters. They proceeded to secure their cargo with the blessing of the ruler, who took part of the spoils obtained from the vessels. In these cases, the *laksamana*, naturally, followed the requisite loyalty to the Sultan, which involved protecting the Malaccan waters to ensure the territorial integrity of his kingdom. The *penghulu bendahari* was a treasurer in charge of all the state's revenues, and was responsible for the ruler's servants and clerks as well. In his function as treasurer, the *penghulu bendahari* kept record of revenues gained by various means. Part of the sultan's wealth derived from the suzerainty exercised over the *jajahan takluk*

*Melaka*, which included smaller ports and villages in the hinterland. Other income came from trading activities carried out within the dominion of the sultanate. Still other wealth was at times obtained from sharing in the fruits of the *orang laut*'s activities at sea. Further riches were gained from time to time when the ruler determined that some members of the nobility were accumulating an excess of property or wealth, from which it was considered the Sultan's right to take a part. The *ulamak*, teachers of the Islamic religion, occupied a place in the social hierarchy at about the same level as the above-mentioned ministers. The presence of the *ulamak* served to further Islamic understandings, especially among the ruling class.

Below this second-tier of ministers and *ulamak* were various titled nobles, some of whom were descendants of the royal lineage, while others had acquired nobility through the bestowing of a royal title, often for services loyally rendered. "A meeting of the nobles constituted a form of council or assembly, *mesyuarat bicara*, in which views could be heard and then a decision taken by *muafakat* (consensus). According to Andaya and Andaya (1984: 47), "it was this collective decision-making process which was thought to have prevented arbitrary acts by a ruler and to have guaranteed that a resolution taken would be faithfully implemented." Given the hierarchical structure of the Malaccan state, and the imperative for absolute loyalty to the ruler, *maufakat* may well have implied a non-contestation to mandates from the Sultan or the *bendahara*, to be faithfully supported by the ministers and by members of the lesser nobility.

In Malacca proper, there was a *shahbandar*, the authority specifically in charge of municipal affairs. Given Malacca's prominence as a seaport, a primary function of the *shahbandar* was to act as the Port Authority. Below the *shahbandar* came the ordinary people, or those not a part of the court *per se*. The first group was known as the *orang merdeheka*. Due to the impossibility of capturing exact translations of this and other terms, we will refer to the *orang merdeheka* loosely as the free *rakyat*. These were ordinary people, often small-scale local merchants, fishermen, or agriculturalists-fruticulturalists whose living did not depend directly on the court system. A segment of the *orang merdeheka* were people who had in some manner gained release from their previous bonded or indentured status as servants, of sorts, to the court's nobility. An additional small group of 'free' *rakyat* were the foreign merchants – often of Indian, Arabic or Chinese origin – who engaged in the trade and sale of a variety of goods. Many of them were seasonal residents who would come and go between Malacca and their homelands based on the monsoon seasons.

There was a sizable group of people within the Malaccan population known as the *orang hamba*. Studies written in English often utilize the word 'slave' to translate the term *hamba*. While the *orang hamba* were not free men or women, it may be more accurate to refer to them as a sort of servant or servile class, who lived and worked in the courts, attending to members of the nobility, to the ministers, or possibly to the *Raja* and his royal family. The position of the *orang*

*hamba* is depicted in the literature at the bottom of the Malaccan social hierarchy. In the sense of their not being free men and women, this depiction is accurate. However, due to their access to, or life within the Malaccan court, the *orang hamba* occupied a curious position of being on the lower end of the commonfolk and being, at the same time, a part of the royal court. The ability to move within the court afforded many of the *orang hamba* a lifestyle well beyond the standard of the sizable *orang merdeheka* class. As such, the word slave may not adequately describe the functions nor the lifestyle of many of the *orang hamba*.

In line with the position taken by Milner (1982), the present article maintains that the structure of the Malaccan state, and the internalized conceptions held by its subjects, ...

...entails an understanding of political experience which does not fit comfortably into Western categories... . Neither Raja nor subject is shown to be motivated by power or wealth or any other "practical" objective... . The Raja is not only the "key institution" but the only institution, and the role he plays in the lives of his subjects is as much moral and religious as political. Malays believed service to the ruler offered the opportunity for social and spiritual advancement. They understood that their position in this life and the next depended on the Raja; he was the bond holding men together, and the idiom through which the community experienced the world. Men were not so much subjects as extensions of the Raja (Milner 1982: 113).

Deeply instilled within the worldview held throughout all levels of Malaccan society was the notion of *adat*, which pertains to customary behavior, notions of propriety, and of a person's rightful place within larger society. *Adat* is closely tied with both the Islamic religion and with the implicit understanding of the relationship between the ruler and his subjects. As such, *adat* plays a strong role in determining how people may act within their society, as well as shaping interactions taking place among individuals (Hooker 1972). People's position, as being under a Raja, or sultan, served to give them a definition of both the community, and of the self *viv-a-vis* the ruler and the *kerajaan*, or the sultanate. *Adat* served as an internalized set of codes concerning the individual, the ruler, and society at large. This implicit understanding of 'self' in terms of these wider relations within the Malaccan polity is substantively different from the common modern notion of the state's function and duty to protect citizens' rights and interests as individuals.

The purpose of the above section has been to provide a sketch of the structure of the Malaccan Sultanate, as well as touching upon implicit understandings of the relationship between the subject and the larger society. The time period in which Malay statecraft emerged and was consolidated in the Malaccan Sultanate ranged from 1400 to 1511, when life was interrupted by the arrival of the Portuguese to the region.

## THE EUROPEAN COLONIAL PRESENCE

### THE PORTUGUESE AND THE DUTCH

In 1511, the Portuguese captured Melaka as part of a strategy aimed at establishing control over the Muslim-dominated spice trade to Europe. Malacca's last Sultan, Mahmud Shah, fled from the region and his son, Alauddin Shah, eventually re-established the sultanate in Johor (Harris 1990).

By the early 17<sup>th</sup> century the Dutch, spearheaded by the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, 1602 - 1874), were overshadowing the Portuguese as the major European presence in the region. The Malay sultanate, which had established itself in Johor-Riau as a result of the Portuguese conquest of Malacca, saw the Dutch as potential allies against both the Portuguese and the Acehneese, who had raided the area and were vying for control of the Straits of Malacca. In 1636, the Dutch's VOC and the Johor Sultanate joined forces. In 1640 they attacked the Portuguese citadel at Malacca and successfully took it over in 1641. During this time period, Johor dominated as the major entrepot, and Dutch Malacca became simply a smaller port dedicated to fueling Johor-Riau's bustling trade (Andaya & Andaya 1984). The peninsula continued under the control of the Malay and Dutch overlords until 1699 when Johor's Sultan Mahmud was murdered by subjects from the nobility, thus challenging the Malay concept of *daulat*, or absolute loyalty to the ruler based on his position as a vice-regent here on Earth.

## THE BRITISH PRESENCE IN THE MALAY WORLD

### THE MEETING OF TWO CIVILIZATIONAL TRADITIONS

The waning influence of Dutch financial and military power – combined with the disorder wrought by the murder of Sultan Mahmud – aided the British in becoming a major presence in the region. By mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, the English had come to dominate trade in India, Southeast Asia and China as well (Andaya & Andaya 1984). Their presence was to have a profound effect on the peoples of the Malay World.

### IMPORTANT HISTORICAL MOMENTS

In 1768, the British established themselves in Penang; and in 1819, they created an entrepot in Singapore, whose power and influence were unrivaled by any of the Malay kingdoms. By 1824, the British and the Dutch accorded the Anglo-Dutch Treaty. By doing so, “they irrevocably divided the Riau-Johor kingdom and arbitrarily severed the cultural unity of east coast Sumatra and the peninsula... The Treaty of 1824 provided the rationale for the later colonial division

down the Melaka Straits and is thus the basis for the contemporary boundary between Indonesia and Malaysia” (Andaya & Andaya 1984: 122).

In 1826, the ports of Singapore, Penang and Melaka were formed into an administrative unit called the Straits Settlements, which came under direct British rule. In 1841 Englishman James Brooke was named the Raja of Sarawak and established a system of ‘white rajas’ which was to control Sarawak up until World War II. In 1874 The Pangkor Treaty was signed, stipulating that the British must be consulted and heeded by the Sultans in all affairs, except those pertaining to Malay custom and religion. In 1881, the British North Borneo Company was established in what is now Sabah. In 1896 the Federated Malay States were established to include Negeri Sembilan, Perak, Selangor and Pahang. The rest of the ‘Malay states’ – Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, and Johor<sup>2</sup> – while remaining unfederated, also came under British control through the installation of a colonial advisor to each of the Sultans.

The Pangkor Treaty, with its establishment of the British role as mandatory advisors to the Sultans, formed the cornerstone of colonial policy toward the nine Sultanates existing within the region. Figure 3 provides a summary of the diverse structures of British rule in the lands which today make up Malaysia.

While Figure 3 summarizes the various forms of British hegemony in the region, the focus of the ensuing analysis will be on British influence in the Federated and the Unfederated Malay States, where the *kerajaan* system remained formally intact under British rule.

#### THE BRITISH SYSTEM IN COLONIAL MALAYA: THE MALAY STATES

The British, wanting stability in order to ensure ongoing trade and prosperity, began to advise Malay Sultans on how to govern in a ‘civilized’ manner, meaning adopting English law, government and, as much as possible, way of life (Andaya & Andaya 1984). Due to British power, many of the rulers saw that it was to their benefit to submit to the colonizers’ model and implicitly serve British interests. However, this emulation of the British by some Malay rulers sparked debate among the community about what it meant to be Malay, and how far alien understandings could be adopted without compromising *Melayu* identity, values and traditions.

Reflecting the diverse positions of the Sultans concerning this debate, different responses to the Western presence were seen in the actions of different rulers. While some attempted to develop increasingly more English-type models, as might be seen in the cases of Perak and Selangor, others such as in Terengganu, aimed to expand a judicial system based on *Syariah* law. Yet despite the very real differences in responses to the British hand in governance, the Sultans’ overarching aim was the same: the maintenance of meaningful Malay political control when it was apparent that economic initiatives were passing into British hands. Underlying the diverse responses by the Sultans to British

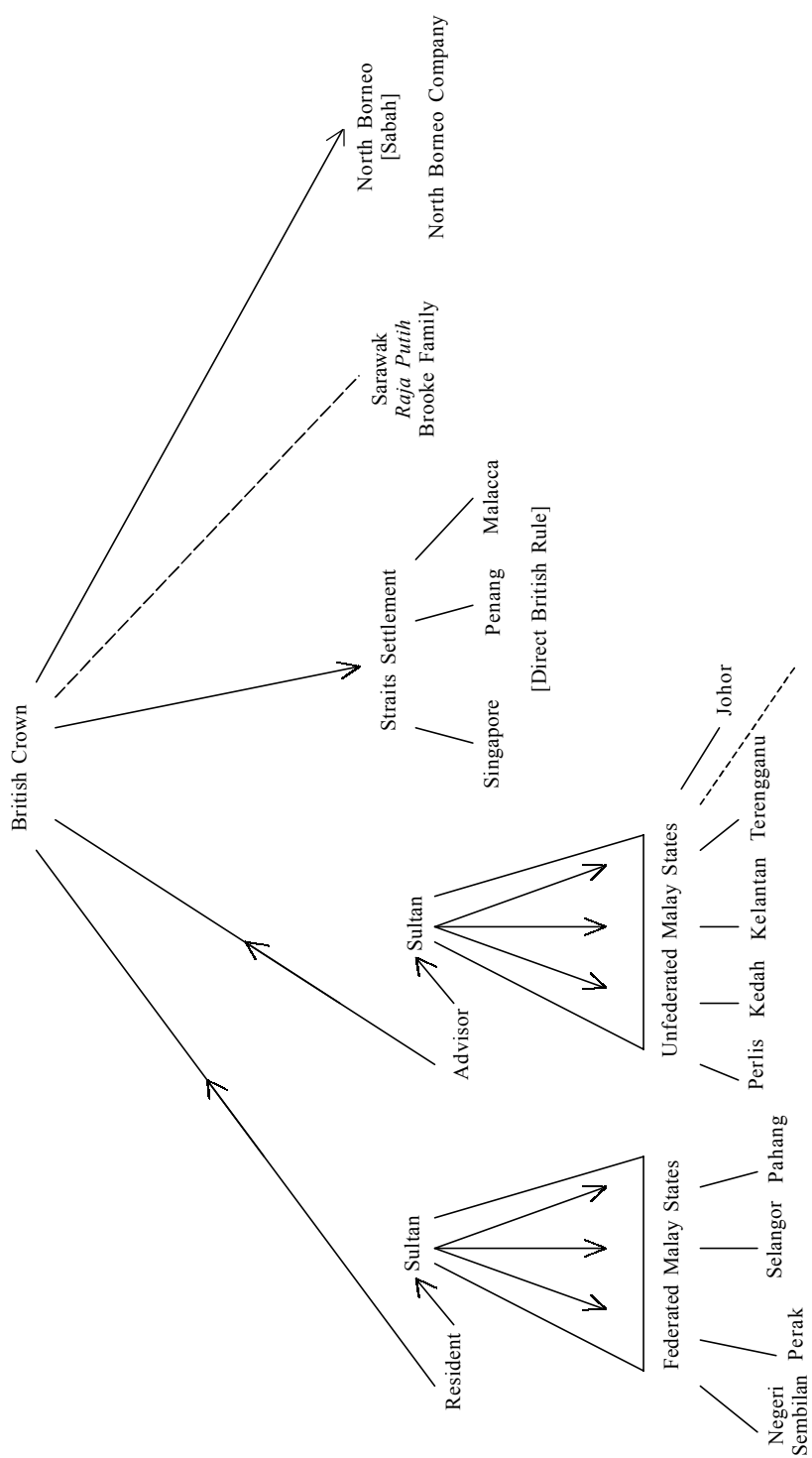
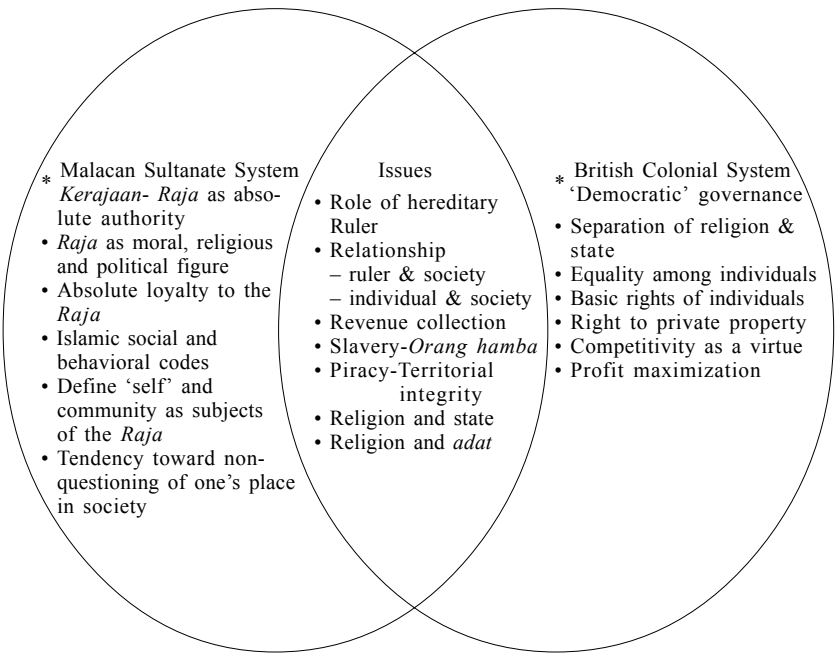


FIGURE 3. Summary of forms of British Colonial Rule

hegemony, there exists a worldview and a set of assumptions embedded in the *kerajaan* tradition which impacts directly on issues of governance. Figure 4 aims to summarize a few of the differences in implicit understandings brought to the critical juncture by both the Malays and their British overlords.

Throughout the Malaccan tradition, the Raja, or Sultan, was viewed as much as a religious and moral figure, as a leader of state in the Western sense. As such, the notion of ‘the separation of religion and state’ inherent in the British mind, did not exist in the traditional Malay notion of governance. Furthermore, where the British tradition espoused equality and democratic forms of governance, the Malay saw himself as subject of the *Raja* and the *kerajaan*. As such, ideas of equality, and governance by the people were not within the implicit understandings underpinning Malay statecraft. It follows then that the idea of individual rights – such as the right to private property – was not prevalent in the system where a man’s property could be appropriated if the ruler so desired. The western capitalist notion of competitiveness as a value leading to the accumulation of personal fortune was not present in the same manner within a mindset where the definition of ‘self’ depended on the subject’s position *vis-a-*



\* Underlying assumptions and values

FIGURE 4. The impact of implicit values and worldviews on *Melayu* and British understandings of various issues pertaining to governance

vis the Raja and the *kerajaan*. Furthermore, the Srivijayan-Malaccan code of loyalty to the ruler, overlaid with the Islamic precept of absolute submission to the Divine, constitutes internalized understandings which are vastly different from the Western ideas of individuality and work for individual gain. These are only a few of the underlying differences which the Malay and the British brought within themselves to the critical juncture, where the civilizational paradigm of the latter was superimposed on the existing system. The ensuing section of this article will examine how these inherent differences may have had a strong, yet often unexamined bearing on several of the ‘thorny’ issues arising in the actual exercise of governance during the British period.

## ISSUES ARISING FROM GRAFTING OF BRITISH COLONIAL SYSTEM ON KERAJAAN PARADIGM

### THE ROLE OF THE HEREDITARY RULER

Whereas the British understanding of kingship was that of the constitutional monarchy, the Malay system constituted an absolute monarchy. In the contemporary British understanding, the head of the royal state – the queen is the figurehead under which governance is carried out based on a constitution. Furthermore, the purpose of said governance is to ensure the rights and the well being of individual citizens within the polity. This stands in contrast with the Malay idea of self, defined largely as a subject of the *Raja* and the *Kerajaan* (Milner 1982).

### THE SEPARATION OF RELIGION AND STATE

The British system which separated matters of religion and state did not fit within the Malay understanding implicit in the concept of *daulat*, where the Raja was viewed as a semi-divine ruler, appointed as vice-regent on Earth (Zainal Abidin 1970). As such, given “the relationship between the ruler on his throne and Allah, ... mankind must perform good deeds for Allah, the Prophet and the ruler”. The king is described as ‘the surrogate of Allah in the world’ (Muhammad Yusoff 1992: 120). The very concept of separating affairs of religion and governance arose as a product of the European Enlightenment. As Figure 1 above indicates, this difference in understanding is one of many underlying points of divergence between the British colonial system and the structure of religion-governance present in the *Dunia Melayu*.

### ADAT AND AGAMA

As can be seen from the discussion above, the British drew several distinctions which were meaningless to the Malays, and were often at odds with the Malay



values system. For example, the British were not to interfere in issues pertaining to religion (*agama*) and custom (*adat*), yet they were to serve as advisors on issues of politics and administration. For the Malays, this distinction between politico-administrative questions and *agama-adat* was not real. "The division between religious and secular so clear-cut to Europeans was simply an alien concept to Malays" (Andaya & Andaya 1984:159). Given the notion of *daulat*, governance under the Raja was inseparable from the implicit religious meanings embodied in the person of the *Raja*, and in the fact of one's being a subject of the *kerajaan*. Furthermore, *adat* was determined by the codes of conduct of the ruling class – the nobility – and governed at the individual level by one's place within the *kerajaan* structure. How then, might the Malays have understood the British policy of acting as political advisors and avoiding interference in issues of *adat* and *agama*?

#### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

As such, it stands to reason that underlying assumptions concerning the relationship between the individual and society differed vastly between the British and the Malays. The Enlightenment tradition underlying British assumptions, parts from such premises as the pursuit of one's freedom and happiness, as legitimate and desirable driving forces for the individual within society. From here stems an implicit positive valuing of such actions as profit maximization, individual accumulation of wealth, competitiveness and the assertion of one's rights as an individual citizen, which the governing authority has the obligation to protect. Although these traits were also found among the Malays, historically, the thrust of the individual's sense of worth was derived largely from such actions as loyal service to the *Raja* and to the Divine, as well as the articulation of one's place within larger society.

#### WEALTH AND REVENUE COLLECTION

Sources of revenue for the Malay sultans had traditionally come from such activities as charging port fees, exacting tribute from vassal states within the empire, taking a share of goods confiscated by the *orang laut* from passing vessels and, from time to time, the appropriation of wealth accumulated by subjects of the *kerajaan*. In addition, a Raja's wealth was measured in the number of free subjects and *orang hamba* whose loyalty he was able to command. British assumptions concerning wealth and revenue collection were based on different notions from these precepts. For example, the values of individual accumulation of wealth, profit maximization and competitiveness – forming the basis of British economic activities – constitute an area of divergence in paradigmatic assumptions between the British and the Malays.

#### THE APPROPRIATION OF THE WEALTH OF SUBJECTS BY THE *KERAJAAN*

Throughout the time of the Malaccan sultanate, the exacting of tribute and the taking of material goods were considered to be legitimate activities of the Sultan and the *kerajaan*. According to Gullick (1988: 131): "Malay chiefs controlled the economy of their districts because they needed the surplus above the producers' needs to sustain themselves and the armed following which was the basis of their power. Moreover, they feared to allow anyone else to become rich and thereby have the potentiality of setting up a rivalry in power."

The grafting of the British system, with its underlying beliefs that the state has the duty to protect the individual right to private property and wealth, constitutes another point of divergence in assumptions underlying the two systems. As such, the British considered the appropriation of the wealth and property of subjects to be an illegitimate means of accumulation. They, instead, attempted to create a structure for systematic taxation, which they considered to be a legitimate mode of revenue collection by the authorities.

#### PIRACY AND THE *ORANG LAUT*

The *orang laut* had long been engaged in boarding ships passing through the Straits of Malacca and appropriating their cargo. Once done, a portion of the spoils was often shared with the *Raja* or a local chieftain. It appeared that two motives were the primary factors driving the activities of the *orang laut*. On the one hand was the obvious interest in collecting goods from vessels seen to be encroaching on territorial waters. An additional factor appeared to have been to oblige ships to engage in trade at Malacca proper if the merchant ships wished to avoid the *orang laut*'s appropriation of their goods.

The British considered such activities to be acts of piracy, and thus proceeded to engage in a campaign against it. While these types of activities had long been a part of the Malay tradition, they were illegitimized by the manner in which the British viewed and labeled them. Through both persuasion and the use of force, these activities of the *orang laut* had essentially ceased by the 1870s. Here again, a severe blow was dealt to the Malay chiefs as another traditional form of gaining revenue had been curtailed.

#### SLAVERY AND THE *ORANG HAMBA*

An additional difference between the two civilizational paradigms can be seen in each one's understandings of what constituted 'slavery', and the *orang hamba*. In the Malaccan system, there were basically three types of slaves. The first were the ordinary slaves, whose work could involve virtually any type of labor, ranging from being oarsman to coconut tree climbers. The second group were the debt slaves, those who paid for a debt through service to the *tuan* (master); included in this group were thieves who when caught, were unable to return the

stolen goods. In the third category were the royal slaves. These were usually people who had committed a criminal offense, had been caught and given a royal pardon, after which they became slaves (Muhammad Yusoff 1992). The *orang hamba* greatly enhanced the status of the *orang kaya* who owned them. In terms of their standard of living, some of the *orang hamba* had a higher standard of living than their free counterparts, or the *orang merdehaka*, whose living often came from fishing, agriculture, moving the *orang asli*'s jungle products to the markets and so on. Although the *orang hamba*, based on their functions in society, were clearly placed in the lowest social category, the *Hukum Kanun Melaka* provided them with certain rights.

The British worldview saw the existence of the *orang hamba* as a condition unacceptable to exist in 'any state under British protection'. This difference in understanding between the British and the Malay paradigms brought considerable tensions to relations between the two groups. "In the Malay World the human resources represented by slaves were as important to the status of the ruler or chief as revenue itself." For example, "through debt bondage chiefs and rulers gained followers to increase their status and an economic asset which could be transferred, if need be, to some other creditor ... because slavery was so bound up with a chief's prestige, British inquiries into [the condition of the *orang hamba*] aroused considerable resentment among Malay nobles" (Andaya & Andaya 1984: 160-161).

These are just a few of the salient areas where the British and the Malay systems did not fit comfortably with one another. To the modern reader embracing the predominant post-Enlightenment values system, it may seem obvious that the British assessment of the above-mentioned issues is correct. However, before making such a simple judgment, one must attempt to understand the eyes, or the implicit values and worldview upon which the *dunia Melayu* system was based. The author's aim is not to suggest correctness, or incorrectness on either side; rather, the goal is to point out how implicit and largely unconscious paradigmatic assumptions will cause diverse actors to view and value the same phenomena in radically different ways. This is often a source of conflict when two or more civilizational paradigms come into contact.

### BRITISH MALAYA: A PLURAL SOCIETY

Although it is beyond the focus of the present analysis, it would be an oversight not to address the plurality of peoples found in the Malay region during British colonial times. The aim of the present section is to provide a brief summary of the complexities of the demographic makeup of colonial Malaya. Further study using the I-S A to assess critical junctures among the ethnic groups found in the region would shed light on present-day racial politics in modern Malaysia. While people of diverse cultural communities have long been present in the Malay world, the migration of Chinese and Indians to the region increased greatly

under colonial rule. The British colonizers largely believed that Malays were not willing or suitable to work as laborers in the colonial enterprises. To meet the demand for labor, the colonizers brought in large numbers of Chinese immigrants to work in commerce, tin mines and commercial agriculture. In addition, many people from the Indian subcontinent were brought over to work on British estates and rubber plantations. Added to the presence of the British themselves, the 'importation' of vast numbers of Chinese and Indians represented a profound change in the demographic composition of the region.

The Chinese living in Malaya – along with the British – found commercial agriculture and tin mining to be means of gaining profit and advancement. It was the Chinese who came to dominate the tin trade. Due largely to the demand for labor in the tin mines, migration from China increased markedly from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The successful Chinese eventually began bypassing the Malay sultans in their economic affairs and dealing directly with the British, once again contributing to the Malay sense of loss of politico-economic control in the region (Harris 1990). The drop in tin prices toward the end of the 1800s led to a decrease in Chinese migration which, in turn, led to a labor shortage. The solution was to turn to the Indian subcontinent to meet the demand for manpower. Although Indians had been migrating to the Malay world for generations, under British rule, the rate accelerated markedly. Between the 1870s and 1880s, the Indian population in the area rose by 188%. Most of the migrants were Tamils who were considered more accepting of discipline than the Chinese, and more willing to work for wages than the Malay (Andaya & Andaya 1984).

It was largely due to the ongoing supply of cheap Indian labor that Malaysia's rubber industry became a success. Unlike Indians who had previously occupied high places in the traditional Malay courts, the vast majority of those arriving during the colonial period did not have access to socio-economic ascent outside of their position as cheap labor. Collectively, the new wave of Indian migrants had very little political power or influence. Their wages were kept low by agreement between private enterprise and government service which employed them. Poverty remained high among Indian labor, unlike the few wealthy Indian traders or merchants found in urban centers. While the colonial government employed Indians in public works, municipal services and rail construction, the majority of their migrant population was employed by private enterprise on estates. The political and economic power of Indians as an immigrant group was overall very limited.

With the influx of migrant populations, British categorized the demographic breakdown of Malaya in three broadly-defined ethnic divisions: Chinese, Indians and Malays, which were actually quite heterogeneous in their makeup. British administration did not consider Eurasians, nor mixed peoples in their categorization of peoples found in the region. Socio-economic stratification in colonial Malaya found the British on top, followed by the Chinese, with the Indians and the Malays at the bottom of the hierarchy. Although the Malay

sultanates officially remained intact, the traditional ways of life, the modes of gaining revenue and, more importantly, the royal system – with its religion, *adat* (custom), and absolute deference to the ruler – were profoundly disrupted and, in practice, the Sultans and chieftains found themselves at the margins of both political and economic power. As a result, many Malay leaders perceived a threat to their identity, their way of life and collective dignity resulting from the disruption caused by colonization.

This marginalization gave rise to debate among the Malay concerning how much of the colonial system could be adopted without losing their ‘Malayness’, raising...

...new and disturbing questions concerning the relationship between ‘civilization’ as it was defined by the West, and what it was to be a Malay. The adoption of much that was foreign to Malay custom [had brought advances to several of the Malay rulers.] But how far could an individual go along this road without jeopardizing his ‘Malayness’? The clearest articulation of this problem came from Riau, long a center of Islamic scholarship and still regarded as an arbiter of Malay culture. Court writings expressed concern at the decline of traditional custom, especially among the youth, and urged Malays to maintain the purity of their language by eliminating accretions which had crept in through association with other races. To the Islamic-educated elite, the growing foreign incursions appeared a direct threat not only to their religion, but to Malay culture itself... . The Muslim community could undoubtedly learn from Western technology, but to adopt Western values unquestioningly would undermine the health of Islam and strike at the essence of Malay culture...

Discussions gained additional stimulus during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century because everywhere Islam seemed to be retreating before the advance of the Christian West. Debates in the Islamic heartlands assumed a new immediacy for Malays... Malay newspapers, journals and religious teachers fostered the view that self-strengthening and reform within Islam was [sic] the only solution to the Western challenge’ (Andaya & Andaya 1984: 152).

Independent Malaysia has inherited a largely British form of governance superimposed on an existing paradigm, which arose from the Srivijayan-Malaccan tradition. The migration of large number of Chinese and the Indians to British Malaya adds a rich complexity to the equation of the diverse civilizational paradigms, making up Malaysian society today. Further studies should address questions concerning the multiplicity of civilizational paradigms present in the country, and how these impact on the political arena today.

#### I-SA REFLECTIONS ON THE MEETING OF THE BRITISH AND THE MALAY CIVILIZATIONAL TRADITIONS

To better understand how the I-S A views the overlaying of the British colonial structure on the Malay *kerajaan* system, it is useful to explain some of the major constructs and assumptions upon which the analytical framework rests.

#### IDEOLOGICAL-STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS: BASIC TERMS, ASSUMPTIONS AND CONSTRUCTS

A basic proposition of the I-S A is that actors from diverse cultural communities, or civilization traditions, bring different internal filters within themselves to the critical junctures – or the actual encounters occurring, in this case, between the British colonizers and the Malay leadership. These interpretive mechanisms, held largely below the level of conscious awareness, to a large degree structure the way in which actors will interpret, value, and respond to given situations. Implicit differences in these invisible structuring mechanisms are often a source of tension and misunderstanding among groups from diverse traditions. Examples of underlying differences in understanding concern: the role of the hereditary ruler, the relationship between the ruler and society, legitimate-illegitimate forms of revenue collection, slavery-*orang hamba*, piracy-territorial integrity, religion and state, religion and *adat*, among others.

#### CIVILIZATIONAL PARADIGMS

The term civilizational paradigm refers to the historical belief system to which a cultural community traces its roots. These paradigms are often tied to a particular religious or spiritual heritage, which may form the foundation for the collective ways of knowing, interpreting and valuing which are shared within a community. The British in colonial Malaysia were products of the western post-Enlightenment tradition, which assumes such concepts as the separation of religion and politics, whereas the Malay system evolved from the notion of the semi-divine status of the ruler. As such, to the Malay mind, the separation of religious and political matters was meaningless. Whereas the British envisioned a constitutional role for the monarch, the Malay system was an absolute monarchy to which all people were subjects. Where the British saw the state as being at the service of society, the Malay *Kerajaan* system was such that individuals were largely at the service of the *Raja*.

The British called for a centralized system of revenue collection and taxation, which severely limited the royalty's modes of acquiring wealth. Slavery was abolished, cutting off another source of the Sultan's wealth and prestige. The collection of goods from trespassing ships, once labeled by the British as piracy, was forbidden, giving rise to the further loss of revenue. In addition, the western notion of the individual right to private property limited the rulers' ability to appropriate wealth from members of the lesser nobility who might eventually challenge their dominance.

#### WORLDVIEW

The term worldview refers to an overarching conception of how the things of life are understood. Worldviews vary from culture to culture, nation to nation, tradi-

tion to tradition. Our internalized worldviews are structured on socially-constructed systems of values, interpretation and understanding, which find common threads within the cultural community in which the person is formed. Deep inherent differences between the British and the Malay worldviews - particularly pertaining to issues of governance, legitimate sources of revenue, religion, and the role of people in relation to the state – formed the bases for divergence in many areas of understanding.

Internalized worldview clearly plays a powerful role in shaping the behaviors, attitudes and interpretations of individuals and of societal collectives as well. Some of the differences in worldview between the Malays and the British can be seen, for example, in the understanding of the role of the state, or the ruler. In addition, a profound difference between the two paradigms can be found in how personal identity is understood among the British and among the Malays. Whereas the British viewed the governance as a system for protecting the rights and interests of the individual, the Malay mind tended more to view the *Raja* as the figurehead around which identity was built. One increased one's standing by faithfully serving the *Raja* who, in turn, bestowed titles and status on the faithful subject. The subject's status in this life, gained through loyal service to the *Raja*, also counted as good works to be taken into the next life.

#### IDEOLOGY

What constitutes the power of the idea? Ideas, or ideologies, are not tangible structures; yet they have the power to set parameters around people's understanding and interpretation of phenomena encountered in day to day experiences. Only when we have attempted to understand how the sharing of ideas or ideology within cultural communities has the enormous power to structure both group and individual identities, may we begin to address the question of how the incursion of ideas, reality constructions, notions of the sacred, etc. from outside—through contact with members of other civilizational paradigms—has the power to promote identity consolidation and/or bring about changes within existing cultural, societal, national and world paradigms. In this light, clear differences in personal identity *vis-a-vis* the external structure of governance, or *kerajaan*, become apparent. While Malay response to the British presence showed instances of both rejection and conformity to the British incursion, governance in present day Malaysia also reflects aspects of both assimilation and rejection of the system left by the British, and by the globalizing West at large.

For the purpose of this paper, ideology is understood as a set of beliefs or reality constructions shared by members of a given group, polity or culture. The dominant ideology found within a given system is based upon the values, attitudes and beliefs of the group's holding power. Ideologies and truths are internalized by a critical mass of individuals and are considered by the I-SA as being

subjective and varying from culture to culture, or group to group. In addition, ideology and truth constructions are dynamic—meaning that they change over time through exposure, for example, to the promoters of the power holders' belief system—such as mass media, education, religious doctrine and other purveyors of truth as defined by the state, the system, the religion, the cultural community, or the group in power (López 1997). Michael Apple (1990) defines ideology as a system of ideas, beliefs, fundamental commitments or values about social reality. Ideology, then, has to do with the legitimization of actions, values and beliefs placed on society, forming a part of the structuring mechanism which holds it together. Collectively-held ideology serves for

...the justification of group action and its social acceptance. This holds whether the writer speaks of rationalization of vested interests, attempts to 'maintain a particular societal role,' or justificatory, apologetic...activity concerned with the establishment and defense of patterns of belief. When basic assumptions underlying a social arrangement seem to be seriously challenged, the resulting need for legitimization may well take the form of concern for the sacred.... Ideology [often] seeks to sanctify existence by bringing it under the domination of the ultimately 'right' principles (Apple 1990: 23).

One of the responses of Malay society to the British presence was to re-examine Malayness, particularly in terms of the place of Islam in Malay identity. One of the basic questions within the debates is on just how much of the British model and worldviews could be incorporated without compromising the essential ideology, value and worldview which are at the foundation of Malay identity. The ideology – or the sum total of conceptualizing, valuing, and interpreting – embedded in the collective and individual Malay identity constructions were, in a sense, squeezed by the arrival and subsequent imposition of the British ideology and system over traditional ways of life. In the overlaying of external ideological-structures on an existing system, the outside presence often constrains or limits traditional practice or ways of life. This can be seen clearly in the case of the Sultans under the British system, (i.e. in terms of revenue collection, slavery, *orang hamba*, etc.). External constraints (i.e. the British system) imposed on our internalized understandings of the *kerajaan* system and, thus, external practice, cause a chafing, or a frustration, as we are no longer able to operate in ways that are comfortable or customary to us. This encounter and overlaying of one system on another gives rise to a process of both resistance and change. Just as we see this clearly in the case of the *kerajaan* system in British Malaya, a parallel might be drawn to a similar tension-dynamic concerning today's Malaysian state in the context of globalization.

#### STRUCTURES

Human beings group into collectives of different types, such as ethnic, linguistic and/or religious groups, families, systems of governance or *kerajaan*. Structures are the commonalties which bind them together into the grouping and



provide the basis for common ways of interpreting life experience and of interacting. For example, religious codes and social norms provide structures through which people interpret phenomena, as well as setting guidelines shared by the community for what are deemed as appropriate behaviors. Other structuring mechanisms for human groupings include culture, language, ritual, common history and familial ties. These structures are found outside the individual — held by the social grouping — and are imprinted internally within memory store to evoke both cognitive and affective responses to life experiences (López 1990). Structures — both held by the collective and holding the collective together — are carried around within each individual and will inform how people view, interpret and interact with the world around them. The internalized interpretive lenses are held largely below the level of consciousness as long as stimuli in the external environment do not challenge the way in which understanding is structured. Thus, people who have not experienced contact outside of their own communities tend to take life implicitly as being just how it is within their own milieu. It often takes an affective response to something which falls outside the parameters of our structures of understanding in order to begin seeing how our own individual and collective understandings are organized (Rokeach 1969). When receiving information from outside the community or the collectives where our world views are structured, we often find phenomena which challenge our implicit ways of knowing, thus providing opportunities for increasing awareness of what binds our individual and community understandings together.

Throughout the history of the Malay World, the encounter among members of widely diverse civilizational traditions has occurred, providing ample spaces for cultural shift, change and definition. This type of encounter tends to serve as a catalyst for change within cultural systems while, at the same time, functioning as a point of juxtaposition through which cultural communities may consolidate their own identities. While the Malay encounter with the British (or the ‘West’) served as a catalyst for re-examination and consolidation of Malay-Muslim identity, it has also, over time, brought about changes in both the political system, and the internalized understandings held by the people pertaining to such issues as the role of governance and the basic rights of the governed. Today, we find a synthesis, of sorts, of the British system of governance, infused with aspects of the *kerajaan* system — with its inherent political logic — in both the structures and the laws of the modern Malaysian governing apparatus.

#### CULTURAL COMMUNITIES

The implicit values and interpretive attachments through which actors will understand and respond to external phenomena are largely formed through immersion within a particular cultural milieu. Cultures are essentially common ways of thinking and doing which develop historically because of somewhat isolated in-group communication (Littlejohn 1992). They differ among others, due to less

contact between cultures than within cultures. Societies consist of connected groups that cluster together according to common beliefs, values and behavior. Groups and cultures are open systems sustained by communication, or the transfer of beliefs and interpretations among individuals in a collective. Intergroup communication creates a network of relations among people that comprises the structure of a cultural community (Kincaid 1987). Culture then, is a shared set of interpretations and rituals, constituting a major structuring mechanism around which human communities group. Constructs such as shared history, religion, political understanding, values and general ways of knowing are some of the ideological threads holding cultures together. This is not to say that culture is monolithic; instead, it is viewed as the set of commonalities binding a particular social group together. Cultural structures are dynamic in as much as there is not a complete homogeneity within cultures; those members or subgroups who do not entirely fit within the structures (i.e. minority groups) of the cultural belief system, may act as agents of change as their differences serve as a catalyst through which the culture experiences shift and flux as it aims to continue unifying the grouping.

Another major factor impacting on the dynamics of cultural life is the presence of external catalysts, which exert pressure on the culture to shift, accommodate and adapt. An example of shift and absorption brought about by outside forces can be seen in the early grafting of the Islamic faith onto the Malaccan state system. Over the years, the Islamic faith went from its grafted state to playing a very central role in the Malay values, worldview and identity construction.

Interaction with different cultural communities may lead to a partial adoption or adaptation of the outside group's norms. However, if the outsiders are viewed in a negative manner, their presence tends to solidify the particularistic identity of a cultural community, as it turns inward and unifies against a perceived external threat to group identity and way of life. Here we see the identity consolidation of Malay culture in response to the British presence. At the same time, British colonial structures of governance spurred a profound departure from many aspects of the pre-colonial *kerajaan* system, which can be seen in the structure and function of the modern Malaysian state.

Henry Giroux (1981) views culture as being embedded in the dynamics of class, power and conflict. He argues the distinction between power and culture is false. His politicized notion of culture includes the dialectical character of the relationship between ideology and the socio-economic system. Culture, then, is more than an expression of shared experiences forged within the social and economic spheres of a given society. It is a complex realm of contending experiences mediated by power and struggle, and rooted in the structural opposition between the more and the less powerful. In the imposition of culture, power is used unequally to produce different meanings and practices, which reproduces a particular kind of society that functions in the interest of the dominant classes.

Today, the roots of Malay identity remain somewhat linked to the Malaccan and pre-Malaccan past, where individual and collective identities centered around the subjects' place *viv-a-vis* the Sultan and ultimately, the Divine. The arrival of the British brought a displacement of power relations for the ruling class, as it found itself – particularly the Sultans – effectively disempowered through the imposition of the colonial system. Furthermore, the de-centering of the Sultans wrought a profound rupture to the identity constructions of the *rakyat*, whose identity had historically depended on the state of being subjects of the king, inherent in the notion of *kerajaan*. Today's discourses and debates concerning the relationship between the individual and society reflect cleavages in identity construction not entirely dissimilar to those spurred by the British presence in colonial times.

#### VALUES

Shared values are one of the foundational structures around which human societies are built. The existence of values within social groupings takes as its point of departure a dichotomized notion of the existence of good and bad. Different phenomena are placed, unconsciously by the historical collective, somewhere along the continuum of good and bad upon which human values systems are structured (Burlinson 1989). These value-attached understandings of the world carry a great deal of affective weight with them. From early on, people internalize the values system prevalent in their external environment, thereby tending to reproduce the values system as it is imbibed and passed on from generation to generation. The inherent messages about how the societal collective views, understands and values social phenomena are instilled very deeply within both the individual and the collective psyche and are carried with us on into adulthood.

Some of the deeply-rooted values found in Malay society pertained to loyalty to authority, following the implicit rules prescribed by *adat*, living within moral and behavioral codes prescribed by the Islamic religion, and adapting unquestioningly to one's identity and place within the larger society. This can be contrasted with the British notions of the separation between religion and state, equality among individuals, respect to basic rights, the right to private property, competitiveness as a virtue, the classical liberal concept of profit maximization, and what Max Weber calls 'the Protestant work ethic', among others. When each of these sets of values is viewed through the lenses of their respective civilizational traditions, they are implicitly seen as being virtuous. However, when one set of values is superimposed on a community holding different inherent assumptions and external manifestations in cultural practice, the result may be a profound misfit between the external value system, and the members of the group upon which it has been superimposed. The British colonial system in the Malay World provides one example of such a situation, where the overlaying of

one civilizational paradigm on another provokes profound shifts within the culture. While many aspects of the grafted system may be rejected by the host culture, as it were, other of its structuring mechanisms may be readily adaptable to the local milieu, resulting in assimilation and adaptation of what is deemed as positive from the outside paradigm.

### SOME FINAL REFLECTIONS

The aim of the present article has been to move beyond the usual point of departure in an attempt to explore the internalized ideological-structural systems that diverse actors bring to the critical juncture implicit within themselves. It is at this level – internalized and shared by the cultural collective, and manifest externally in customs, practices and ways of life – where similarities and differences among civilizational paradigms may converge or diverge at the critical juncture, or point of interaction. The author wishes to suggest that any type of research pertaining to contact among diverse civilizational traditions, should systematically attempt to bring these underlying questions to the fore, in order to better understand both historical encounters and present-day political interactions among diverse cultural communities.

In the case of Malaysia, a further and necessary study would entail a similar type of reflection on the critical junctures of interaction among the various ethnic groups comprising the Malaysian citizenry. Furthermore, any analysis of contemporary Malaysian politics would do well to take into account these complex points of ideological-structural convergence-divergence, which have taken place throughout the unfolding of Malaysian history. The first step for providing a rich and useful contextualization for contemporary political analysis would entail taking a step back into the Malaysian historical context and second, delving beyond concrete encounters into the underlying internalized ideological-structural mechanisms held at the individual and the collective levels by all groups under study. Said ideological-structural analysis would shed a great deal of light on questions of interest in contemporary studies of Malaysian history and politics.

### NOTES

1. Although the colonial presence marked the decline of the Malaccan Sultanate *per se*, the system continued in the Johor-Riau Empire, and in the other 'Malay states' which had previously been dependencies of the Malacca Sultanate. The remaining Sultanates are in Negeri Sembilan, Perak, Selangor, Pahang, Kelantan, Terengganu, Perlis and Kedah.
2. Under Sultan Ibrahim, the state of Johor attempted to chart a course toward modernization which would allow them to remain independent from British control. His

son and successor, Sultan Abu Bakar, continued with his father's policies toward the independent modernization of the monarchy.

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Dr. Carolina López Caballero  
Felo Pelawat Penyelidik  
Dari Northern Arizona University  
di Institut Kajian Malaysia dan Antarabangsa (IKMAS)  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia  
43600 UKM Bangi  
Selangor D.E.  
Malaysia  
e-mail: clc@postmaster.co.uk